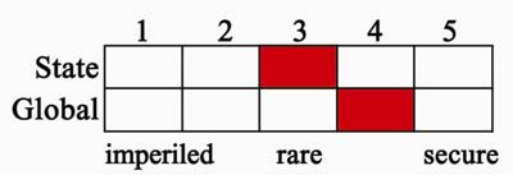
Rare Animals of Louisiana

Paddlefish

Polyodon spathula

Rarity Rank: S3/G4



Identification:

- One of the most distinctive freshwater fishes in North America
- Possesses several primitive features including a cartilaginous skeleton, a heterocercal tail and spiracles
- Elongate, spatulate snout, which is dorso-ventrally flattened and longer than the rest of the head
- Small imbedded scales, an elongate operculum, and relatively small eyes
- Adult weight may reach 45 kg, and length to 1.5 m

Habitat:

- Usually found in large, free-flowing rivers but is frequently found in impoundments
- Spawns in shallow, fast moving waters above gravel bars

Food habits:

Exclusively on zooplankton

Range:

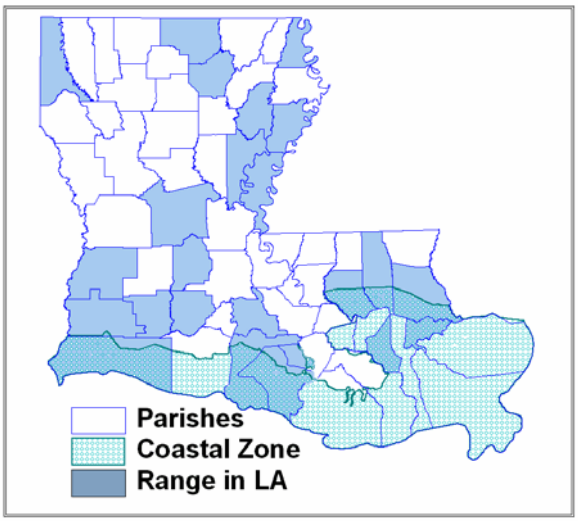
- Formerly found throughout the Mississippi River and Great Lakes drainages but now restricted to the Mississippi River drainage and apparently declining in the periphery of its range
- In Louisiana, this species is probably found throughout most of the major river systems and in larger impoundments

Reproduction:

- Need streams in order to spawn
- Life expectancy is 15 years (though individuals known to live 30 or more)
- Males reach sexual maturity in 7 years, females 9 to 10
- Spawns in early spring during high water; Preferred temperatures around 10 to 15 °C
- Eggs hatch in about 9 days

Threats:

- Habitat alteration through actions such as river modification and the construction and operation of dams
- Pollution as well as fertilizer and pesticide runoff
- Siltation of spawning habitats from soil erosion



Range based on occurrences in Natural Heritage database

- Harvesting has in the past caused a decrease in population

Beneficial Management Practices:

- Several states have already established regulations on harvesting
- Prevent destruction of spawning habitats
- Limit the number of dams which prevent migratory movement as well as moving water for spawning

LA River Basins:

Atchafalaya, Calcasieu, Mermentau, Mississippi, Ouachita, Pearl, Pontchartrain, Red, Vermilion-Teche

References:

NatureServe. 2006. NatureServe Explorer: An online encyclopedia of life [web application]. Version 6.1. NatureServe, Arlington, Virginia. Available http://www.natureserve.org/explorer. (Accessed: June 21, 2007).

Native Fish in the Classroom Project – An Aquaculture Stewardship Project

www.lamer.lsu.edu/projects/nativefish/index.htm

Native Fish in the Classroom is a multi-disciplinary classroom-based stewardship project for intermediate and middle school students. The overall goal of the *Native Fish in the Classroom Project* is to assist students in developing an attitude of stewardship toward our natural resources and to provide for them a constructive active learning situation in which they can explore strategies for sustaining our aquatic ecosystems. The following objectives support this goal:

(1) Provide intermediate and middle school students with background information on fisheries management, fish biology, protected species information and aquatic natural resources.
(2) Maintain a classroom-based nursery aquarium in which students will grow native Louisiana fish (paddlefish) from egg to fingerlings.
(3) Produce native paddlefish that can be used by the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries' Booker Fowler Fish Hatchery to help manage a protected fish species population in Louisiana.

Expected Benefits.

Louisiana students will obtain hands-on, real-science knowledge of the state's native aquatic resources.

Louisiana teachers will gain access to the state's Booker Fowler Fish Hatchery as an outdoor education classroom. Participating teachers attend workshops where they build their classroom nursery tank, learn about water quality parameters and receive the Native Fish in the Classroom Teacher Guidebook.

Primary Contact:

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